

Nudging the media

The NLGJA confab in August set its focus on encouraging fairness in mainstream reporting, leaving some queer journalists frustrated

by Rex Wockner

More than 400 members of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association plotted to improve media coverage of the gay and lesbian community during NLGJA's sixth national conference held in Chicago from Aug. 28 to 31.

And they did so in an environment of warm welcome from the mainstream media. Speakers included popular syndicated columnist Molly Ivins, National Public Radio host Scott Simon, Cable News Network anchor Bernard Shaw, *San Francisco Examiner* managing editor Sharon Rosenhouse, and John Brecher, an editor with the *Wall Street Journal*.

Asked if news organizations do a better job of covering gay issues fairly and comprehensively when they have openly lesbian and gay staff, Rosenhouse said: "If you have an all-white newsroom in a multicultural city, that's a problem."

A job fair featured booths representing, among others, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Dallas Morning*

in the newsroom."

At one session, media coverage of the Andrew Cunanan story was criticized.

"It's homo-ignorance," said Liz Tracey of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. "It's not outright prejudice, but simply not knowing the community well enough to tell a story that doesn't come off as homophobic."

This year's convention offered more workshops related to on-line journalism and use of the Internet, as well as issues involving journalists who work for the lesbian and gay media.

But several gay and lesbian press staffers said they still feel like NLGJA's unwanted step-children.

"The amount of gay press participation is very low," said Drew Rapp, managing editor of the *Front Page*, in Raleigh, N.C. "I just spoke with one of the [candidates for NLGJA president] and told her that I was voting for her almost solely on the basis that she mentioned the gay press twice in her statement. It's one of the few times I've heard

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News, Washington Post, Denver Post, Gannett Newspapers, New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Arizona Republic, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, San Francisco Examiner and Philadelphia Inquirer.

The convention program contained ads from ABC News, ABC Inc., NBC News, CBS News, the *Orlando Sentinel*, the *Boston Globe*, Knight-Ridder newspapers, *Entertainment Weekly*, the *Houston Chronicle* and the Hearst Corp.

"Ideally what's happening here and what happens when people go back home is that in an everyday sort of un splashy way, print and broadcast coverage of gay people, gay issues, gay communities and other subjects in which gay people have been otherwise invisible is interstitially becoming more visible day by day in a very workaday kind of way," said *NBC Nightly News* producer Barbara Raab.

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Columnist Molly Ivins spoke at the conference

PHOTO BY KELLY CAMPBELL COURTESY OF BARNES AND NOBLE

the gay press acknowledged here. I've gone to several workshops and almost without exception they forget that their audience includes the gay press."

He added, "What frustrates me is that the discussion still [revolves around the question of]

how gay issues should be covered in the media. I've heard a lot of suggestions come up...people saying, 'Well, there needs to be this kind of story written, there needs to be this kind of work done.' Well, we do it every week, and it's frustrating to be in the audience saying, 'It's there, you're just not reading our paper.'"

NLGJA has 1,200 members and 21 chapters. One of the group's projects is a "Stylebook Ad-

denda on Gay and Lesbian Terminology," slated for release later this year.

According to a press release, "Copy editors are educated [via this addenda] about outdated words, replacing them with more sensitive and preferred terminology."

If the project succeeds, there could well be a decline in mainstream media use of phrases like "self-avowed homosexual," "admitted homosexual," "practicing homosexual," "gay lifestyle" and "special rights for homosexuals."

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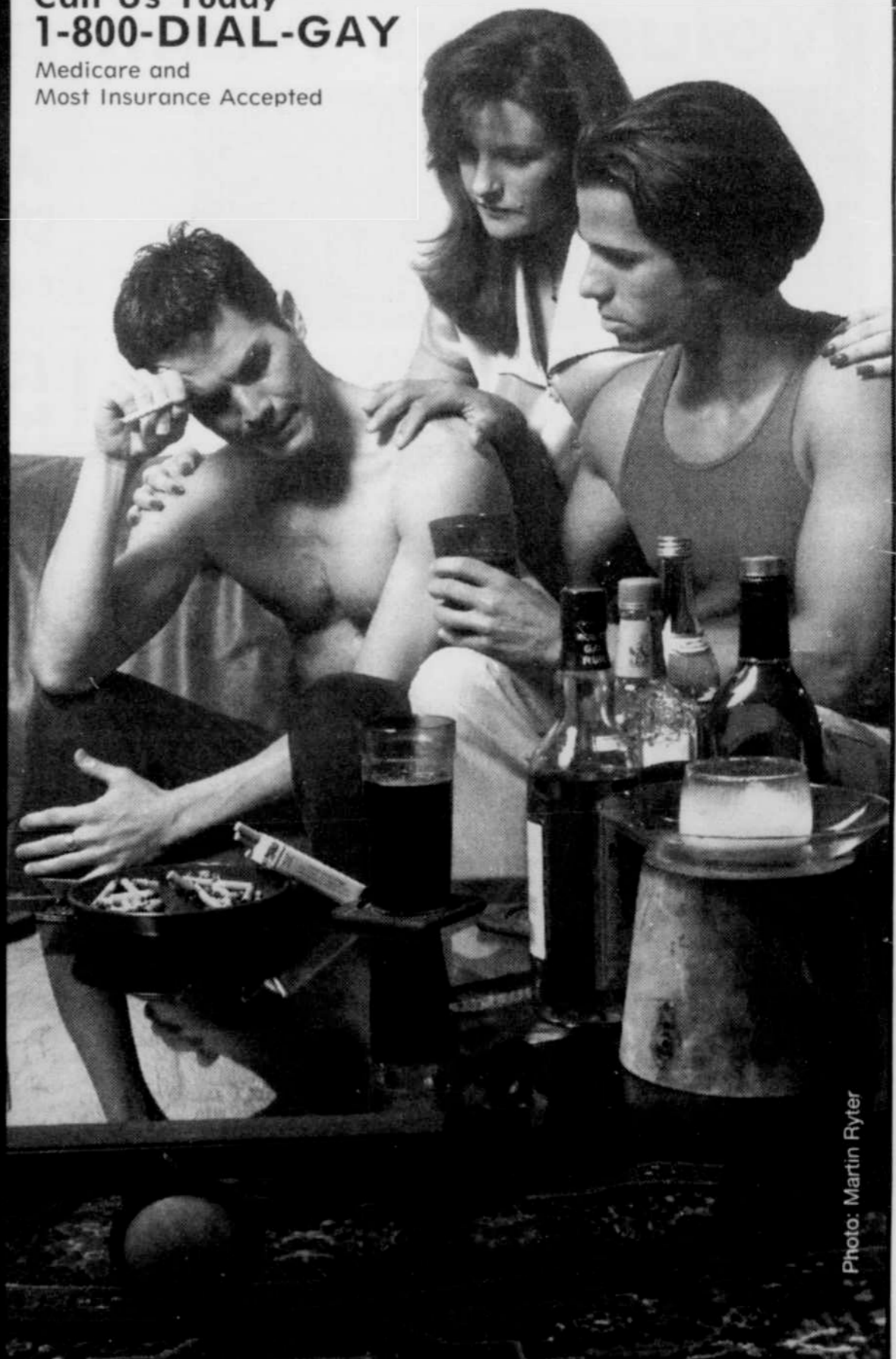


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